



## Staff Support

The IHS Office of Public Health Support (OPHS) presents the eighth in its series of Retention Briefs designed to help address the challenge of retaining professional and clinical staff within an Indian health facility. We encourage you to review these cases and to discuss with the leadership team (administration, clinical directors, other leaders, etc.) how you can implement these practices when faced with similar challenges.

This issue shows how leadership's ability to stand back and let the staff do the work they were hired for can benefit the entire outlook of the team. They'll be able to approach their jobs with the feeling that they're respected and trusted to make decisions. Leadership must also be ready to step back in when situations occur that need attention. In those moments, your presence will assure your staff that that they can continue to do their jobs without the stress of involvement in tricky situations.

*“Yours should be the face of the facility – as a liaison with patients, their families, your staff and Tribal representatives.”*

## Best Practices

### LEADING THE CHARGE

**Overcoming Obstacles** — Health care professionals choose Indian health careers to serve a medically underserved, yet appreciative and deserving patient population. Unfortunately, the primary reason some have identified for leaving an Indian health facility is because their work environment in some way prohibited them from doing their job well. You can change this by creating a practice setting in which the staff is able to perform to the best of their ability. You can further help them by staying actively involved in their professional activities to ensure they don't receive interference from problems within the system.

However, it's key to recognize that some obstacles and challenges are in fact real and, quite possibly, beyond the scope of your control. While your role is to serve as your staff's advocate, at the same time, negative attitudes, poor work habits and an unwillingness to change are signs of a poor fit. If you're willing to step in and help, your staff will appreciate the effort on their behalf. Helping your staff achieve their mission by knowing your employee and their goals and what they want to achieve, even if it means losing your employee to another facility but keeping them within Indian Health.

### EMPLOYEE REFERRAL PROGRAMS

**Staff Recommendations** — What are the qualities, skills and personalities necessary to succeed in your facility? Ask your staff members. In fact, one of the most successful hiring practices today is the Employee Referral Program. You can even implement an employee referral bonus or reward structure to encourage finding suitable candidates. Establish a benchmark, such as a one-year anniversary of the hire or a promotion within a specific timeframe to reward the appointment. Create strict guidelines to follow, including limiting the hiring of family members and personal friends. The best referral usually comes from within.

### COMMUNITY RELATIONS

**Be a Buffer** — Sometimes, to be a successful leader requires tact and the ability to act as a buffer between the professional staff and local politics. Your staff may not have the training necessary to handle such situations and should be able to rely on you to manage them and make the best decisions for the well-being of patients. That's why it's important to stay abreast of Tribal policies, protocol and procedures and how they relate to the facility staff and patient community. Yours should be the face of the facility — as a liaison with patients, their families, your staff and Tribal representatives. By nurturing a relationship with the local community and showing that you support both the community and the Tribe, you will establish respect and be in a better position to act on behalf of both entities.